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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000900

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, EUR/ACE, DRL

AID/W FOR EE/EA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: PLANS TO COOPERATE WITH MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
ON QUALITY LEARNING PROJECT

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The USAID-funded Quality Learning Project (QLP) started in October 2007, with implementing partners Creative Associates International, Inc. and Abt Associates. The goal of the project is to improve student education in Turkmenistan through expanding new interactive teaching and student assessment methods to primary and secondary schools. To initiate project implementation and cooperation, USAID held a series of meetings with the Ministry of Education (MOE). In the past, the Ministry has communicated to donors that educators in Turkmenistan are already familiar with progressive teaching methods from the Soviet period, and that there is no need for new approaches. However, this view seems to be shifting, and a USAID-sponsored three-day training program in July played a positive role in helping the Ministry see the benefits of progressive education methods. END SUMMARY.

CURRENT SITUATION IN EDUCATION:

¶3. (U) Almost all schools in Turkmenistan use traditional teaching methods which have only limited impact on student learning. Most rural schools are not even familiar with interactive teaching. Only after MOE required implementation of such methods in Ashgabat's School Number 27 did authorities start taking limited action. However, the Ministry has not acquired materials and tools needed to disseminate new methods throughout the country and remains reluctant to adopt and promote new methods. This presents a significant challenge to USAID to persuade the MOE to cooperate.

SUMMARY OF USAID ACTION PLAN:

¶4. (U) To persuade Turkmen education authorities about the relevance of QLP in secondary schools, USAID took the following steps:
-- conveyed a proposal to the MOE on June 7, 2008, which offers activities to support Turkmenistan's participation in the "Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study" (TIMMS) project and introduces innovative approaches in secondary school teaching.
-- facilitated a three-day seminar on July 1-3, 2008, led by Dr. Damir Safin, an education consultant with Creative Associate

International. The seminar -- for specialists and educators of the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Education, the Supreme Council on Science and Technology under the President of Turkmenistan, and UNICEF -- introduced innovative approaches in teaching and solicited participant feedback. Thirty of the participants indicated in feedback that they are looking forward to implementing lessons of the seminar country wide.

-- met with Gulshat Mammedova, first Deputy Minister of Education, Bayram Bashimov, a director of the National Institute of Education, and Mr. Nury Bayramov, a chair of the International Department of the Ministry of Education on July 7, 2008, to discuss cooperation proposed the month before. Mr. William Frej, USAID Regional Mission Director, led the meeting.

MEETING ON JULY 7, 2008

15. (U) USAID requested MOE's approval to start joint implementation of QLP with the National Institute of Education or with another institution or school that the MOE recommends. USAID offered to cover all local and international expenses necessary to initiate the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMMS) program. Immediately after reaching agreement, USAID would bring an expert from a TIMMS team to discuss further activities, as countries that intend to participate in the 2011 project must commit by this fall. Finally, USAID proposed an MOU with MOE.

16. (U) Director of Turkmenistan's National Institute of Education, Bayram Bashimov, gave a briefing on the state of education in Turkmenistan. He noted that Dr. Safin's training on innovative teaching methods energized participants' knowledge. And despite being familiar with similar methods from the Soviet period, he

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offered that this new training was beneficial. Based on the experience of Ashgabat's School Number 27, the Turkmen officials agreed to let USAID staff prepare an MOU that can be jointly amended and/or changed.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Although Turkmen education officials seem conservative in their views, the meeting on July 7 was productive. The deputy minister offered to consider an agreement prepared by USAID staff on strengthening cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The MOU will be given to the Ministry of Education only after USAID/CAR Legal Advisor's approval. END COMMENT.

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